

# Madras thorn

*Pithecellobium dulce*



Madras thorn (also known as Manila tamarind) is a fast-growing tree that is generally planted as an ornamental. Uncontrolled populations of madras thorn can form dense thickets and out-compete native vegetation and pasture.

It can spread quickly across vast tracts of tropical and sub-tropical areas and become costly to agriculture and the environment.

Madras thorn is rare in Queensland, possibly restricted to gardens. An opportunity exists to prevent it becoming a serious problem here. To achieve this, madras thorn must not be sold or grown as a garden ornamental anywhere in the state.

## Legal requirements

Madras thorn is a category 2, 3, 4 and 5 restricted invasive plant under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. It must not be given away, sold, or released into the environment. The Act requires everyone to take all reasonable and practical steps to minimise the risks associated with invasive plants under their control. This is called a general biosecurity obligation (GBO). This fact sheet gives examples of how you can meet your GBO.



**Queensland**  
Government



At a local level, each local government must have a biosecurity plan that covers invasive plants in its area. This plan may include actions to be taken on certain species. Some of these actions may be required under local laws. Contact your local government for more information.

## Description

Madras thorn is a large, fast-growing tree, capable of growing more than 20 m high. The trunk has characteristic spines.

Flowers are fragrant, in small white heads, 1 cm in diameter. Pods are sometimes twisted, pinkish in colour, 1–2 cm wide. Leaves are oval in shape measuring 2–4 cm in length with a bipinate arrangement, often with a pair of sharp spines at the base of the leaf.

Fruit is arranged in linear or curved pods from 10–13 cm in length and contain 5–12 seeds. The seeds are reddish brown to black, elliptical, beanlike, and about 1 cm in length. Pods are initially green but turn brown as they ripen, typically in February to August.

## Distribution and habitat

Madras thorn is native to areas of Mexico, Central America and northern South America.

In Queensland, it has been found at the Sunshine Coast and in Far North Queensland, predominantly in Cairns.

It prefers a dry or semi-dry sub-tropical climate. It is drought-tolerant and can grow in poor soils in dry climates and along coastlines—including areas where its roots are in brackish or salt water.

## Life cycle

Trees first produce flowers at approximately two years of age. Flowering usually occurs in December to May. Flowers are typically pollinated by bees. Propagation is by seed or cuttings.

Germination takes 1–2 days. Seeds are likely to stay viable for a several months (or up to a number of years at a low humidity) due to their hard seeds. Seedlings can reach a height of 1.2 m within six months.

## Methods of spread

Madras thorn reproduces by seed and is mainly spread by birds and cuttings.

## Control

### Managing Madras thorn

The GBO requires a person to take reasonable and practical steps to minimise the risks posed by madras thorn. This fact sheet provides information and some options for controlling madras thorn.

Physical removal is very difficult with this species due to its ability to regrow once cut down, a characteristic which makes it suitable for coppicing. However, larger trees can be cut and the stumps treated with glyphosate to prevent re-sprouting. The use of foliar or basal herbicide treatment may be effective on smaller trees and seedlings.

Call 13 25 23 if you find a plant you suspect may be madras thorn to seek advice on control options.

## More information

For more information contact your local government or visit [biosecurity.qld.gov.au](http://biosecurity.qld.gov.au).

